



GAMES FAQ

Q I've seen gamers' mice that provide 1,600dpi resolutions. What's the difference between these and normal mice and do they really improve your gameplay?

A Optical mice have a resolution measured in dots per inch (dpi). This figure indicates how sensitive the mouse is to movement. Most mice have a resolution of 800dpi, but for gaming mice it's 1,600dpi.

The increased resolution makes your mouse more sensitive to movement, so your onscreen cursor moves twice as fast when you use one of these mice, and they are more accurate, too. It also means you have to move a gaming mouse less far on the desk than you would an 800dpi mouse to make the onscreen cursor move the same distance.

This makes a difference in first-person shooters, which are all about moving as quickly as possible. With a gaming mouse you can turn faster and place your crosshairs more accurately, giving you the edge over opponents. You might find a gaming mouse harder to use than a regular mouse at first, but give it time.

These mice are useful only for first-person shooters. You won't see any improvement when playing strategy games or using Windows.

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▲ Gaming mice can help to improve your game when you're playing first-person shooters

REVIEW FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

SIERRA F.E.A.R.

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £27 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.specialreserve.co.uk

DETAILS www.whatisfear.com



With influences as diverse as *Half-Life 2*, *The Matrix* and Japanese horror films, *First Encounter Assault Recon* (F.E.A.R.) could easily have been a horrible mix of styles and a complete mess. Fortunately, the opposite is true of this game in which you must track down the malevolent spirit of a little girl intent on destroying everything, and the psychic leader of a dead-hard army.

The graphics are amazing. This is the first game we've seen to create lifelike shadows. Enemies' shadows loom large in the distance as they make their way down long corridors towards you. Your shadow flits around too, and there were plenty of times when we jumped and opened fire at it.

But it's the other effects that help bring you into the game. Most spectacular is the way walls explode with every gunshot impact. Fire too many stray shots into a wall, and you must squint through the dust to pick out targets. If you've seen the lobby scene in *The Matrix*, you'll know what to expect.

There's also a bullet-time option where you slow time down so you can pick enemies off. You can see every bullet swirl across the screen and hear each thudding impact as metal meets flesh.

This isn't just a gimmick, though. You'll need to use this ability carefully if you want to get through the game alive, because the enemy soldiers aren't like those in other games. In F.E.A.R., while one soldier pins you down, another will try to flank you. They'll leap through windows, crawl under desks and throw filing cabinets over for protection. It's the toughest shooter we've played in a long time.



Spirit level: find out exactly how frightening little girls can be in *First Encounter Assault Recon*

It's also scary: one minute you're running down a corridor, the next the girl appears in front of you in true horror-film style. Add to that the ghosts that appear and disappear at will, and you've got a game you wouldn't catch us playing alone in a dark room.

There's the usual range of weapons including shotguns, machine guns, pistols, rocket launchers and a nail gun that nails opponents to the wall. The sound is excellent, and you get a real impression of lethal force every time you hear a shot.

If anything counts against the game, it's that the big chase for the psychic is over too soon and too easily. There's no big fight – just a corpse on the floor. From then on, fighting spirits in slow motion just isn't as interesting as pumping bullets into mercenaries. The level design can be formulaic, too, and obvious routes through levels are highlighted.

This is an original and beautiful game, but you will need a powerful PC to play it properly.

David Ludlow



Amazing graphics; exciting action



Needs a powerful PC; action trails off towards the end

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000 or XP, 1.7GHz Pentium 4 processor, 512MB RAM, 5GB disk space. **Product code** B00080FCY6

HOTLIST ACTION GAME

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £25 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.mx2.co.uk

DETAILS www.rockstargames.com



Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas is simply an amazing game, featuring three huge cities, hundreds of varied missions and the chance to do whatever you like. The graphics are lush and look great on a PC's monitor. However, you'll need a joystick to get the most out of it.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 1GHz Pentium III processor, 256MB RAM, 3.6GB disk space. **Product code** GTASA/PCORING/E



HOTLIST SIM AND BATTLE GAME

Stronghold 2

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £18 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.play.com

DETAILS www.stronghold2.com



The sequel to 2001's sleeper hit, *Stronghold 2* takes all the castle-building fun of the first game and makes it even better. This time around you can choose to play the sim game, where you must keep your citizens happy, or the war game, where you battle against the computer for control of the map. There's loads of gameplay in this innovative game, which should keep you busy for hours at a time.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 1.4GHz Pentium 4, 256MB RAM, 32MB graphics card, 2.5GB disk space. **Product code** B0007GIX0W



HOTLIST ONLINE SHOOTER

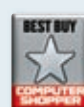
Battlefield 2

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £27 inc VAT

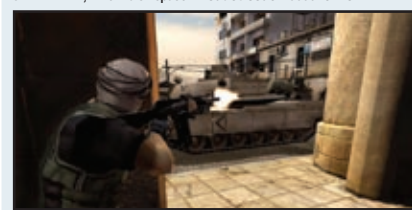
SUPPLIER www.cd-wow.com

DETAILS www.eagames.com



Battlefield 2 updates the original and allows you to play with up to 64 online players. Teamwork is the name of the game, and you will have to use a variety of weapons and vehicles to help achieve your team's objectives. Brilliant fun and stunning to look at, this is one of the best online games available.

REQUIREMENTS Windows XP, 1.7GHz Pentium 4 processor, 512MB RAM, 2.4GB disk space. **Product code** B0006VSLEU





REVIEW ADVENTURE GAME

ATARI
Fahrenheit

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £25 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.ukDETAILS www.atari.com

Fahrenheit has to be one of the most unusual games we've seen in recent years. Most adventure games put the player in control of a hero who is intent on saving the planet; Fahrenheit starts by placing you in control of Lucas Kane, a man who has just murdered a complete stranger for no apparent reason.

More unusually still, you don't just control one character: in Fahrenheit, you can choose to control either Kane or the two police officers attempting to catch him, and it's never really clear who you should help and who you should hinder. Over the course of the game, you also take charge of numerous peripheral characters.

The control system is similarly odd. You view your characters in the third person, but actions are controlled with a series of mouse gestures that mimic hand movements. To open a door, for example, you might push the mouse forward, grab with the left button and then pull it towards you. This system works fairly well. When your character has to react quickly, your reaction time is tested using flashing prompts that you must mimic on the keyboard. At points you must also control your character's breathing using rhythmic key presses. A similar method is, unfortunately, employed during a sex scene – the result looks like two crash-test dummies copulating.

The game has a few other weaknesses. The plot becomes increasingly incomprehensible towards the end, with a final chapter that feels tagged on to extend the game. The soundtrack isn't up to the standard of the graphics, and characters have a habit of getting stuck on parts of the scenery. These shouldn't put you off too much, though.

For all its flaws, Fahrenheit is a genuinely innovative game that draws you in and keeps you playing to the end; a rare accomplishment.

Tom Royal

✓ Innovative storyline and gameplay

✗ Plot feels stretched at the end; interactive sex scenes will never be a good idea

REQUIREMENTS 300MHz Pentium III processor, 64MB RAM, DirectX 8



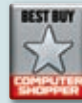
Sadly, even Cillit Bang couldn't manage to shift all those pesky bloodstains from the bathroom floor

REVIEW REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME

TAKE-TWO
INTERACTIVE
Civilization IV

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £18 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.play.comDETAILS www.2kgames.com

Almost every new release is a first-person shooter these days, so it's great to see a good old-fashioned god game hit the shelves. Civilization IV has quite a reputation to live up to, as its predecessor kicked off the entire genre.

While the action remains the same – build cities, collect resources, conquer the world – there are loads of new features. You have a wider choice of characters, including Queen Elizabeth I and Queen Victoria, with whom you can command the British Empire. Every other major empire is included, so there's plenty of choice. Each side has its own strengths and weaknesses, which you discover as you play the game. The way various empires interact is important, too. Your neighbours either try to promote peace or, if you become weak, prepare to take your land.

The game begins in the Stone Age, and you have to build your technology and cities as time progresses. When you first start, you have a map with just a couple of units. This is the duller part of the game, but there's plenty of automation on hand. With a couple of clicks, you can expand your city and explore the surrounding terrain without having to take control of every aspect.

Civilization IV retains the series' turn-based gameplay. It may be a little slow for some people, but being able to plan every move means you can really become a master of the battlefield.

You must also keep your subjects happy and develop your society through agriculture, technology and religion – plenty to keep you occupied before you even get to your first battle.

It's not fast-paced, but if you like detail, hard work and planning then this is the game for you.

David Ludlow

✓ Detailed action; strategy and action elements

✗ Can be a little slow to get going

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 1.2GHz processor, 64MB RAM, 1.7GB disk space. **Product code** B0009XH4CK



Build cities and conquer the world, but keep an eye on neighbours who might try to take your land

REVIEW GAME CREATION SOFTWARE

THE GAME
CREATORS
FPS Creator

RATING ★★★

PRICE £30 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.thegamecreators.comDETAILS www.fpscreator.com

Many first-person shooters come with level editors that let you design your own maps; this is the first application that lets you create your own game from scratch without any programming knowledge.

FPS Creator's interface is easy to use. The world is displayed as a grid from an overhead viewpoint, and the various buildings and corridors that you create are displayed in wireframe. As you move the mouse over certain sections they are rendered automatically so you can see objects and textures in more detail. You can create your map from scratch by painting floors, walls and ceilings in individual blocks, or by dropping in various prefabricated rooms and corridors. The game world can have up to 20 different levels, so you can drop in stairs and set up high sniping positions.

Once you are happy with the map's layout, you can add objects, enemies, weapons and objectives to the world. While you can import your own models into the program, it includes a large selection of ready-made furniture, enemies and guns, split into science fiction and World War II categories. Placing objects is simply a matter of clicking in the game world where you want them to be. Player start points, event triggers and objectives are placed in the same way.

When the level is finished, you can create a standalone executable file. Given the slick editor, the games themselves are rather disappointing. The graphics look out of date, and the enemy AI and collision detection are poor.

FPS Creator is well designed and easy to use, but you would get more satisfying results by using a level editor with a professionally produced game.

Chris Finnamore

✓ Easy to use; excellent interface

✗ Outdated graphics; bad enemy AI

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, Pentium III 1GHz or equivalent, 512MB RAM, 1.4GB disk space, DirectX 9.0c or better, DirectX 9.0 compatible 3D graphics card with at least 64MB RAM



Create your own first-person shooter from scratch without needing any programming knowledge